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ABSTRACT

Surprisingly little systematic research has been conducted using school records as a source in determining students' at-risk status for achievement and behavioral difficulties. School records represent measures of permanent products of student behavior and chronicle attempts to meet the diverse needs of the school population. Behavioral profiles of students (n=137) referred to School Study Teams and who were considered at-risk and not at-risk for achievement and disruption behavior problems were contrasted using the School Archival Records Search (SARS). The SARS systematically quantifies school record data and categorizes it on archival variables frequently found in school records. This investigation showed that school records reliably discriminated at-risk from not at-risk groups on variables frequently used in traditional psychoeducational assessment models as well as on variables found in behavioral assessment models (e.g., behavior ratings of social skills, problem behaviors, and direct observations). Students at-risk for achievement difficulties showed a distinct profile of lower functioning in academic achievement, Verbal and Performance IQ, and social skills. Students at-risk for disruption had higher scores for conduct problems, hyperactivity, and critical events and lower scores on academic engaged time and Performance IQ. Differences in the parallelism of social skills profiles were observed for at-risk students in achievement difficulties. Contains 12 references. (Author/JBJ)

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BEHAVIORAL PROFILES OF STUDENTS CONSIDERED AT-RISK USING SCHOOL RECORDS

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ABSTRACT

Behavioral profiles of students referred to School Study Teams (SSTs) and who were considered at-risk and not at-risk for achievement and disruption behavior problems were contrasted using the School Archival Records Search (SARS) (Walker, Block-Pedago, Todis, & Severson, 1991). The SARS systematically quantifies school record data and categorizes it on archival variables frequently found in school records. This investigation showed that school records reliably discriminated at-risk from not at-risk groups on variables frequently used in traditional psychoeducational assessment models as well as on variables found in behavioral assessment models (e.g., behavior ratings of social skills, problem behaviors, and direct observations). Students at-risk for achievement difficulties showed a distinct profile of lower functioning in academic achievement, Verbal and Performance IQ, and social skills. Students at-risk for disruption had higher scores for conduct problems, hyperactivity, and critical events and lower scores on academic engaged time and Performance IQ. Differences in the parallelism of social skills profiles were observed for at-risk students in achievement difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly little systematic research has been conducted using school records as a source in determining students' at-risk status for achievement and behavioral difficulties. All schools are required to maintain records on students including attendance, placement in special programs, eligibility for free lunch, as well as certain categories of demographic information. In addition, schools keep records on behavioral events such as discipline referrals, negative narrative comments from teachers, referral to outside agencies, and achievement test performance. In this sense, school records represent measures of permanent products of student behavior and chronicle attempts to meet the diverse needs of the school population.

Walker et al. (1991) suggest that school records are used infrequently as a formal part of the assessment process and receive little weight in decision-making regarding classification and placement decisions. If used at all, school record data are used anecdotally as a means of solidifying foregone consensual conclusions of school study teams regarding at-risk status and eligibility for special education. As such, school records are used frequently as criterion measures of school adjustment difficulties in which suspicions of severe school difficulty or disability status are "validated" or "invalidated". School records rarely are used prospectively to identify or predict student status as being at-risk for current or future academic and/or behavioral adjustment problems.

Most research on school records has been used postdictively in follow-back studies of school dropout (Block-Pedago, 1990; Dunham & Alpert, 1987; Howard & Anderson, 1978; Lloyd, 1974, 1978). Lloyd, for example, indicated that dropout versus graduation status could be accurately predicted on the sole basis of information available in sixth-grade school records (e.g., absenteeism rates, grade retention, achievement, SES, and family characteristics). Using these data on a sample of third-graders, Lloyd (1978) correctly predicted 79% of graduates and 67% of dropouts in high school.

Walker and associates have used school records to contrast behavioral adjustment profiles of control and antisocial students and in predicting arrest status (Walker, Stieber, & O'Neill, 1990; Walker, Stieber, Ramsey, & O'Neill, 1990). Walker et al. (1990a) found that in comparison to controls, antisocial students in Grades 5-7 experiences severe behavioral, academic, and social deficits during middle school years. Antisocial students showed progressive increases in Grades 5-7 in number of school absences and discipline contacts and corresponding decreases in math achievement and social skills. Citing previous research, Walker et al. (1990a) suggested that a high rate of school discipline contacts and poor attendance might be important predictors of later school dropout.

Purpose of Present Investigation

Whereas previous investigations using school records have emphasized the prediction of school dropouts, the present study sought to compare social behavioral

and academic profiles of students referred to school study teams. Students were defined as at-risk or not at-risk using a systematic means of quantifying school record data entitled the School Archival Records Search (SARS) (Walker et al., 1991). The SARS quantifies students' status on 11 archival variables: (a) achievement test information, (b) attendance, (c) demographics, (d) grade retentions, (e) disciplinary contacts, (f) within-school referrals, (g) certification for special education, (h) placement out of regular classroom, (i) receiving Chapter I services, (j) out-of-school referrals, and (k) negative narrative comments.

Factor analytic work with the SARS based on 307 cases found that the 11 SARS variables loaded on three factors : (a) Disruption (referrals within school for behavioral problems, disciplinary contacts with principal, referrals to outside agencies, and negative narrative comments), (b) Achievement (receives Chapter I services, negative narrative comments, and achievement test total score below the 40th percentile), and (c) Needs Assistance (placement in non-regular classroom, current IEP, within-school referral for speech and language, and within-school referral for academic help). The Needs Assistance domain was not of particular relevance in this study given the characteristics of our sample.

The present study classified students as being at-risk or not at-risk for Achievement and Disruption domains and contrasted their social skill, problem behavior, and cognitive profiles. Given that the present sample consisted of children referred for academic and behavioral difficulties, the results were interpreted with the context of national normative samples available for the profile variables.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 151 students in Grades 2-4 who were referred to school study teams (SSTs) during the 1992-93 and 1993-94 school years in five southern California school districts. The sample was stratified by ethnicity with 35.8% being Anglo, 29.1% Black, and 35.1% Hispanic. Of the 151 cases, 14 cases had missing data on one or more variables and were eliminated from all subsequent analyses yielding a final sample of 137 students.

Independent Variable

The independent variable was students' at risk status in two domains of the SARS: Achievement and Disruption (Walker et al., 1991). Eighty-five students were considered at-risk in the achievement domain with 52 students classified as not at-risk. Within the Disruption domain, 16 students were classified at-risk and 121 as not at-risk.

The Achievement domain is a composite of students' status as receiving Chapter I services, negative narrative comments, and low achievement (<40th percentile on a standardized group achievement test). The Disruption domain is a composite of students' status on school discipline contacts, within school referrals for behavioral problems, referrals out of school for specialized assistance for behavior problems, and

negative narrative comments.

Dependent Variables

Two sets of dependent variables were used to differentiate At-Risk from Not At-Risk groups. The first set contrasted groups on global measures of cognitive and behavioral functioning whereas the second set contrasted the groups on specific indices of social competence.

Fourteen measures served as dependent variables in the first analysis. These measures included: VIQ and PIQ from the WISC-III (Wechsler, 1991); Reading, Arithmetic, and Spelling from the WRAT-R (Jastak & Wilkinson, 1984); Social Skill, Problem Behavior, and Academic Competence from the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990); Conduct Problem, Hyperactivity, Inattentive-Passive, and Hyperactivity Index from the Conners Teacher Rating Scale (Conners, 1990); Critical Events Index and Academic Engaged Time from the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (Walker & Severson, 1992).

In the second set of analyses, subscales of the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) were used to contrast groups. These subscales include: Cooperation, Assertion, Self-Control, Externalizing, Internalizing, and Hyperactivity. These six measures constituted a social competence profile for the groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first set of analyses, two one-way MANOVAs with repeated measures were computed using at-risk status in Achievement and Disruption domains as the independent variable in each analysis. Fourteen dependent variables were used in each MANOVA. To facilitate interpretations of the profile analysis, all dependent variables were standardized to the same scale of measurement (M=100, SD=15). The approximate F ratios for testing multivariate hypotheses were based on Wilks' lambda.

Within the Achievement domain, there was a significant main effect for group $F(13,123)=94.33$, $p<.0001$. Using Wilks' lambda, this effect accounted for almost 91% of the variance between the groups in profile levels. Of more importance was the test for parallelism of profiles using the Group X Measure interaction. This effect was significant, $F(13,123)=2.90$, $p<.001$ and accounted for 25% of the variance. This interaction effect indicated that the profiles of the two groups were nonparallel.

Tukey's HSD simultaneous confidence intervals which controls for experimentwise Type I error rate showed that At-Risk students had lower scores on social skills, academic competence, Verbal IQ, Performance IQ, Reading, Arithmetic, and Spelling. These students had higher scores of problem behaviors, conduct problems, inattentive-passive, and hyperactivity index.

Within the Disruption domain, there was a significant main effect for Group, $F(13,123)=41.01$, $p<.0001$ accounting for 81% of the variance (lambda=.19). There

was also a significant Group X Measure interaction effect, $F(13,123)=4.14$, $p<.0001$ which accounted for 30% of the variance. This interaction effect indicated that the profiles of the two groups were not parallel. Tukey HSD contrasts revealed that At-Risk students had higher scores problem behaviors, conduct problems, hyperactivity, hyperactivity index, and critical events. These students had lower scores on academic engaged time and Performance IQ.

The second set of analyses involved two, 2 (Group) 6 (SSRS subscales) repeated measures MANOVA. In the first analysis, there was a significant Group X Measure interaction effect, $F(5,131)=2.89$, $p<.01$ which accounted for 10% of the variance (lambda=.90) indicating that the profiles of the groups were nonparallel. Students considered At-Risk for achievement difficulties had lower scores for Cooperation and Self-Control and evidenced higher scores for Externalizing, Internalizing, and Hyperactivity Problems ($p<.01$).

A 2 (Group) X 6 (SSRS subscales) repeated measures MANOVA revealed no significant effects for level or nonparallelism of profiles.

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